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Social Protection for Enhanced Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa

Stephen Devereux¹

¹ Stephen Devereux, Centre for Social Protection, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, UK

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Abstract: This paper identifies several positive synergies between social protection programmes and food security outcomes. One function of social protection is to manage and reduce vulnerability, and several instruments are reviewed – weather-indexed insurance, public works programmes, emergency food aid and buffer stock management – which all contribute to stabilising income and access to food across good and bad years, or between the harvest and the hungry season. Other social protection instruments aim to contribute to raising household income and crop production, for instance agricultural input subsidies or input trade fairs, as well as public works projects that construct or maintain physical infrastructure such as rural feeder roads and irrigation canals. This paper also argues that food security can be strengthened if social justice is introduced to the design and delivery of social protection programmes. Examples reviewed include rights-based approaches such as employment guarantee schemes, community-based targeting and social audits. The paper concludes by arguing for a comprehensive approach to social protection that will achieve sustainable food security, by combining interventions that stabilise income or food production with those that raise income or food production, and are designed and delivered in ways that enhance social justice.

Keywords: Sub-Saharan Africa, food security, social protection

JEL Classification: Q1, Q18, O13

Introduction

Social protection is a relatively new and rapidly growing, but still evolving, policy agenda. There is no consensus on the boundaries of social protection, but most operational definitions include two elements: social assistance (protection against poverty) and social insurance (protection against vulnerability). A third component advocated by some definitions addresses social injustice and exclusion ("*social equity* to protect people against social risks such as discrimination or abuse" (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004: 9)). A recent definition that includes all three components was proposed by the 2010 European Report on 'Social Protection for Inclusive Development':

"A specific set of actions to address the vulnerability of people's life *through social insurance*, offering protection against risk and adversity throughout life; *through social assistance*, offering payments and in kind transfers to support and enable the poor; and *through inclusion efforts* that enhance the capability of the marginalised to access social insurance and assistance" (European Communities, 2010: 1).

The primary functions of social protection are to alleviate income poverty and manage vulnerability. Poverty alleviation or reduction is achieved by raising household incomes, while income or livelihood vulnerability can be managed or reduced by stabilising incomes. Vulnerability also has a social dimension, related to marginalisation and exclusion, and this can be addressed through strategies that empower people.

Recent thinking on social protection emphasises 'graduation' and 'self-reliance'. For low-income households that have labour capacity, social protection should provide only temporary support, and should promote sustainable livelihoods rather than dependence on 'handouts'. Graduation from Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), for instance, is defined as a transition from 'chronically food insecure' to 'food sufficient'. "A household has graduated when, in the absence of receiving PSNP transfers, it can meet its food needs for all 12 months and is able to withstand modest shocks" (Government of Ethiopia, 2007: 1).

Food insecurity is closely related to poverty and vulnerability, especially among farming households in rural areas, where income and crop production (especially food crops) overlap strongly. It follows that there is a close relationship between social protection and food security, and this paper will identify several synergies and linkages between them, both conceptually and in policy formulation and programme implementation. Specifically, social protection can promote food security by:

- **stabilising incomes:** mitigating seasonal stress, managing risk and insuring against shocks;
- **raising incomes:** promoting agriculture and enhancing rural livelihoods;
- **enhancing social justice:** empowering poor farmers, pastoralists and landless labourers.

Before the 'Washington consensus' thinking that inspired the agricultural liberalisation reforms throughout sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s, governments intervened directly in the agricultural sector to protect household and national food security. Typical interventions (some of which are discussed below) included national grain reserves to stabilise food supplies, fertiliser subsidies to ensure access to inputs for poor smallholders, and food price subsidies to protect access to food for poor consumers. This 'old social protection agenda' was expensive, untargeted and interfered with market development, but after these measures were abolished or scaled down, food insecurity increased in many countries, at least for a transitional period. Since about 2000, the 'new social protection agenda' (Devereux, 2009) has provided partial protection against weak markets, seasonal food price fluctuations and food supply shocks, but instead of intervening at the sector level, African governments and donors now deliver targeted support to vulnerable individuals and households.

The overall objective of this paper is to explore the current state of social protection in sub-Saharan Africa and the role it plays in terms of enhancing the food security of communities, households and individuals. This paper is structured along these three arenas of intervention, while recognising the powerful synergies and overlaps between them – for instance, many social protection interventions aim to achieve more than one of these three objectives.

Each section of the paper will discuss the conceptual relationship between social protection and food security in terms of the specific objective under review, and will illustrate this by referring to relevant policy instruments. Case studies of specific programmes – drawn mainly but not only from recent experiences in Africa – will also be introduced and critically reviewed. The paper concludes by suggesting policy options for African countries that want to strengthen the synergies between social protection mechanisms and enhanced food security outcomes.

1. Stabilising incomes

Fluctuations in food supplies or prices magnify food insecurity in poor and vulnerable households. Many mechanisms have been devised for protecting food security in such contexts. These include innovative approaches to agricultural insurance, offering temporary employment opportunities on public works programmes, giving food aid or cash transfers to targeted individuals or households, and managing food supplies through strategic grain reserves. This section examines the strengths and limitations of each of these mechanisms.

1.1. Insurance

Conventional private insurance rarely reaches poor crop farmers and livestock producers in Africa, because of insurance problems including 'covariate risk' (the likelihood that large numbers of claims will be made simultaneously following a drought-triggered harvest failure, for instance) and 'moral hazard' (the possibility that insured farmers or pastoralists will neglect their fields or animals, in the knowledge that they will receive compensation for their losses). Weather-indexed insurance is an innovative approach that avoids some of these problems. Payments are triggered when total rainfall is less than a predefined

threshold, and claims can be settled quickly, since no individual assessment is required (Hazell and Hess, 2010).

Despite being promoted by the World Bank and other agencies as a market-based social protection instrument and successfully piloted (usually on a subsidised basis) in several countries, weather-indexed insurance faces many challenges. Firstly, private sector interventions will only succeed if they are commercially viable, and poor farmers either cannot afford or are unwilling to pay market-related premiums. Risk-averse people living close to subsistence are more likely to cut spending, say by withdrawing children from school, than to increase spending by buying insurance (Chetty and Looney, 2005). Secondly, payouts are not related to actual losses experienced by each farmer but to an index based on rainfall data, so individual food security might be inadequately protected. Thirdly, the only agricultural risk covered is low total rainfall – no provision is made for intra-seasonal rainfall variability, flooding, crop pests or livestock diseases.

1.2. Employment creation

Public works programmes have been a popular response to poverty and food insecurity in Africa for decades. Governments and donors favour public works over free 'handouts' because the work requirement makes these interventions self-targeting – only very poor people will do heavy manual labour for low food or cash wages – thereby avoiding 'dependency', and because they can create useful assets, so they have the potential to promote economic growth as well as meeting social protection objectives. If they are well-timed, public works schemes also respond to the problem of seasonal unemployment in tropical countries, where months of hard work during the farming season are followed after the harvest by several months when there is little on-farm work to do and off-farm income-generating opportunities are typically scarce. Food- and cash-for-work programmes are often designed to enhance food security both immediately and in the long-term, by transferring food or cash to participants and promoting agriculture (e.g. by terracing hillsides or digging irrigation canals) or linking farmers to markets (e.g. by constructing or rehabilitating rural feeder roads).

Public works programmes are controversial. Paying participants below-market wages in an attempt to target the poorest has been criticised as unethical (contradicting 'decent work' principles) and counter-productive (since energy is expended doing manual labour, the net nutritional benefits transferred though low food or cash wages can be negligible). Public works projects are often badly timed, competing for labour precisely when farmers face peak on-farm labour requirements. Also, because the assets created by public works are labour-intensive and use very little capital equipment they are often inferior in quality, and without adequate maintenance budgets they can deteriorate rapidly after the project ends. Finally, some of the most food insecure people are unable to work – people with disabilities, older persons, the chronically ill – so public works is inappropriate for these people and alternative social protection mechanisms are needed to reach them (Devereux, 2010).

An innovative approach to public works is India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which offers a legislated right to work for 100 days each year to every rural household. The main advantages are that access to paid work is demand-driven – people choose to work when they need it – and it is underpinned by legislation – if

work cannot be provided, the local administration has to pay applicants anyway. If this demand-driven approach is followed, if fair wages are paid and if 'decent work' principles are applied, then employment creation programmes should continue to play a significant role in supporting household food security in Africa.

1.3. Social transfers

Food insecurity can be addressed most directly by giving food insecure people food (food aid) or the means to access food (conditional or unconditional cash transfers).

1.3.1. Food aid

Despite being the main modality for delivering emergency relief and social protection in Africa since at least the 1960s, food aid has been heavily criticised for several reasons. Decades of food aid have achieved little in terms of reducing chronic food insecurity; evaluations of project food aid – school feeding, food-for-work – as well as emergency food aid have concluded that its effectiveness is limited mainly to alleviating transitory or acute food insecurity. Moreover, food aid sent to Africa by Western donors was critiqued as a self-serving mechanism for 'dumping' of surpluses produced by heavily subsidised agriculture in Europe and North America. Other complaints are that food aid is expensive to deliver, it floods domestic markets and undermines incentives for local farmers and traders, it can generate 'dependency' (though there is little empirical evidence for this), and it is paternalistic because it fails to respect beneficiary preferences (Barrett and Maxwell, 2005).

Nonetheless, food transfers do have several advantages, as a means of smoothing consumption in contexts of food price and supply variability. Most importantly, food retains its commodity value – a kilogram of wheat in the granary is always a kilogram of wheat, whatever its price and availability in local markets. Where markets are weak and food availability is constrained, the simplest way of guaranteeing food security – just giving people food – might be the best. For this reason, food aid still has an important role to play, in emergencies as well as in some non-emergency contexts.

1.3.2. Conditional cash transfers

Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) are extremely popular in Latin America, but much less common in Africa. Conditions are usually applied to uptake of health and education services – specifically, young children should be immunised and older children should attend school, or cash transfers could be withheld from eligible households. The linkages from conditional cash transfers to food security are indirect and long-term. Better educated and healthier people are less likely to be food insecure. But there are risks that introducing multiple objectives to social protection programmes could result in conflicts between objectives. For instance, if the conditions are strictly enforced then the most food insecure families might lose their access to cash transfers because they cannot afford to send their children to school. The context in Africa is also very different to Latin America. For one thing, health and education services are much weaker in most African countries, especially in rural areas where they tend to be either inaccessible or of low quality. Since conditionalities stimulate demand for services, they should only be introduced if supply-side constraints are adequately addressed.

1.3.3. Unconditional cash transfers

In recent years, food aid has been superseded by unconditional cash transfers as the dominant form of social transfer in Africa. In contrast to food aid, cash is seen as more flexible, less paternalistic and meeting more diverse needs. Cash stimulates local economies, generates income and employment multipliers, and incentivises rather than undermines production and trade. But most cash transfer programmes do not take inflation or price seasonality into consideration. In contexts where markets are fragmented and food supplies are constrained, injecting cash transfers might simply drive local food prices even higher. The food price crisis of 2007/08 highlighted the limitations of cash transfers in addressing food price volatility. On many social protection programmes, regular cash transfers lost substantial purchasing power in a short period of time. On Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP), the cash transfer could buy only one-third of the food basket against which it was calibrated within 18 months of the programme's inception in 2007. An attempt to replace irregular food aid with regular cash transfers in Ethiopia faced similar challenges (see Box 1).

Box 1. Case study: The Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia

Since 2005, the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) has delivered cash or food transfers to over eight million Ethiopians for six months each year, through two mechanisms: Public Works for poor people with labour capacity, and Direct Support (unconditional grants) for poor people who are unable to work. The PSNP addresses transitory food insecurity by timing its operations for the annual 'hungry season', and addresses chronic food insecurity by supporting the same households for up to five years, ensuring that productive assets are protected against 'distress sales' for food purchases and building a platform for household investment and accumulation. A strategic objective of the PSNP was to break Ethiopia's decades of dependence on food aid, by shifting from food to cash transfers and by providing long-term support including complementary 'livelihood packages', to facilitate 'graduation' off social assistance into self-reliance. While evaluations have found many positive impacts of the PSNP, the introduction of cash transfers also raised several challenges.

Cash transfers might have contributed to food price inflation

PSNP districts were selected to receive cash transfers rather than food aid only if an assessment concluded that local markets were integrated enough to respond to increased purchasing power. Nonetheless, in some districts cash transfers contributed to food price inflation in the initial years of PSNP implementation, for several reasons. First, because markets in most rural areas are thin, traders were slow to match the increased demand with increased market supplies. Second, PSNP cash transfers were often delivered late and in lump-sums, causing price spikes – especially near pay-points on pay-days – as local traders took advantage of 'windfall' cash transfers by raising prices. Third, farmers who received cash transfers no longer needed to sell their produce for cash, so local market supplies were reduced.

Cash transfers failed to address food price seasonality

In order to make the PSNP cash and food transfers equivalent in value, the cash payment was initially set at 6 Birr per day, enough to buy 3kg of staple cereals at that time. But food prices in rural Ethiopia fluctuate between and within regions, as well as between and within seasons. Within the first year of PSNP implementation, cereal prices were recorded that diverged by more than 100%. In Tigray in mid-2005, 6 Birr could buy only 2.5 kg of cereal, but the same amount of cash could buy 5.9 kg in SNNPR later the same year. No provision was made in setting the PSNP cash payment level for either regional variations or regular price seasonality.

Cash transfers failed to adjust for food price inflation

The global food price crisis of 2007/08 also affected Ethiopia – food prices doubled in just 18 months, following a long period of moderate rates of inflation. This caused a collapse in the purchasing power of PSNP cash transfers, compromising the programme objective of ensuring household food security through market purchases. By mid-2008 the average retail cereals price was almost three times higher than when the PSNP was launched in January 2005, but the cash payment had been raised only from 6 Birr to 8 Birr a day – a wholly inadequate adjustment.

Beneficiary preferences shifted from cash transfers back to food aid

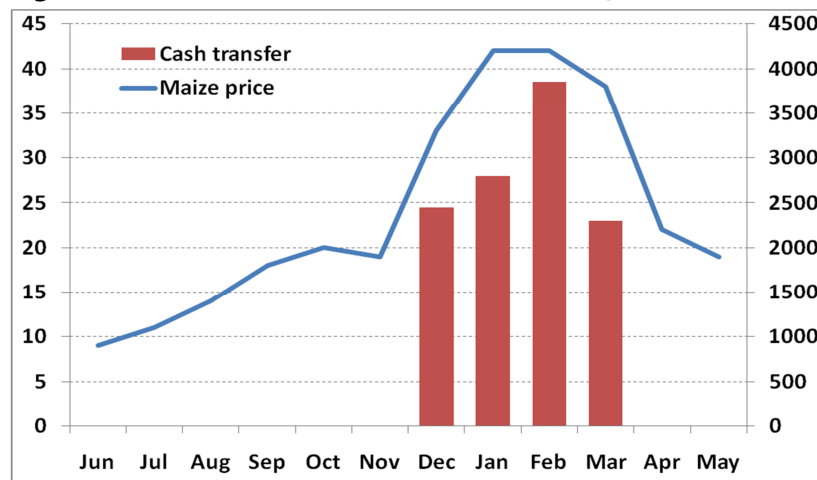
As food prices rose and the real value of cash fell, so PSNP beneficiary attitudes to food and cash transfers shifted. In 2006, beneficiaries surveyed were divided: 55% expressed a preference for 'food only' but 45% favoured 'cash only' or 'half cash and half food'. Two years later, only 16% preferred cash or 'cash plus food', while 84% wanted payments only in food. This was a rational response to the shifting terms of trade between food and cash, as one respondent explained. *"The beneficiaries preferred the payment to be in food and they did not want the cash payment. Since the price of food was increasing they could not buy enough food with the cash given to them. The main problem was lack of food and its high price."*

Source: Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux (2009)

1.3.4. Social transfers and food price volatility

Social transfers – both cash and food – have not historically been responsive to food price volatility, or even to predictable price seasonality, even though this is recognised as a driver of food insecurity in Africa (Devereux, 2010). But there are some positive experiences to learn from. In Malawi, the 'Food and Cash Transfer' (FACT) and 'Dowa Emergency Cash Transfers' (DECT) projects both index-linked their monthly cash transfers to local food and non-food prices, raising the payment every month as food prices rose to maintain constant purchasing power throughout the food crisis period (see Figure 1). While this successfully protected household food security until prices started falling just before the next harvest, it required a degree of administrative and budgetary flexibility that is inconceivable for most governments and donor agencies.

Figure 1. Index-linked cash transfers in Malawi, 2006



Source: Adapted from Devereux (2008)

Apart from index-linking cash transfers to food prices, there are other ways in which social transfers can be adapted to protect household food security, even when food prices are fluctuating. Options include:

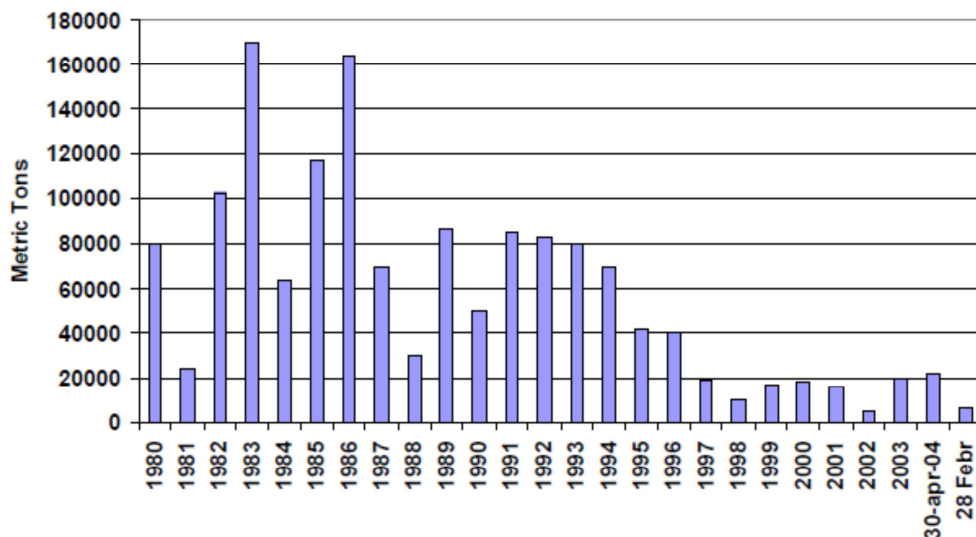
1. **Deliver transfers half in cash and half in food:** In Swaziland's Emergency Drought Response (EDR) of 2007/8, implemented by Save the Children, 40,000 drought-affected people were given a half ration of food (maize, beans and oil) plus the equivalent in cash, each month for 6 months from November 2007 until the harvest of April 2008 (Devereux and Jere, 2008).
2. **Transfer cash when prices are low and food when prices are high:** Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme implemented a "cash first principle" in an effort to move away from food aid, but when this ambition was compromised by food price inflation in 2007/8 the decision was taken to "make more strategic use of food particularly in areas most affected by high food prices ... to schedule them for periods of highest food prices" (Government of Ethiopia, 2009: 22).

3. **Extend the duration of cash transfers when prices rise:** Also on Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme, which normally delivers unconditional cash transfers and public works projects for 6 months each year, it has been proposed that support to PSNP beneficiaries should be extended to 8-9 months in years when harvests fail or food prices rise (FEG Consulting, 2008).
4. **Provide transfers in the form of vouchers rather than cash or food:** In Malawi in 2001/2, a ‘Safety Net Pilot Project’, implemented by Concern Universal, compared transfers of equivalent value made in either cash, food or vouchers, the logic being that vouchers can guarantee access to food without undermining markets. But vouchers performed disappointingly: an evaluation found that vouchers were the most expensive and complex to administer, while some traders exploited beneficiaries by inflating their prices (Levy *et al.*, 2002).

1.4. Food supply management and food stocks

Until the 1980s, many African governments maintained national grain reserves as a food security mechanism, which they used to stabilise food supplies and prices across seasons and in bad years. Buffer stocks were replenished by purchasing from farmers after harvest, often at guaranteed prices to incentivise production, and released onto the market at cost plus storage price several months later, when market supplies were dwindling and prices started rising. In some cases buffer stocks were used to defend an inter-seasonal “price band” – to keep market prices between a floor and a ceiling level – but in other cases they served an emergency function, to prevent food crises. Grain reserves were criticised as expensive, inefficient and prone to corruption or political manipulation, and under agricultural liberalisation reforms they were scaled down, semi-commercialised or closed. But this left governments with limited capacity to respond to food supply shocks. The scaling down of ADMARC in Malawi and OPVN in Niger (see Figure 2) contributed to the famines that followed in 2002 and 2005 respectively (Devereux, 2002; Cornia and Deotti, 2008).

Figure 2. Level of the National Food Security Reserve in Niger, 1980–2005



Source: Cornia and Deotti (2008: 6)

Recent thinking recognises the important food security function of buffer stocks, but argues that they should be managed independently of government and should combine physical stocks with a financial fund, to reduce storage costs while facilitating timely imports of staple food when needed (Ellis, 2010). There might also be scope for regional coordination around food supply management – e.g. at SADC, IGAD or ECOWAS level – building on lessons from the 2007/08 food price crisis, when rice prices halved within weeks of Japan announcing that it would release its reserve stocks to stabilise supplies and discourage speculation (Timmer, 2009).

2. Raising incomes

The most effective approaches to poverty reduction in rural Africa are those that raise returns to key productive assets, especially labour and land. Since most poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is still concentrated among smallholder families, investing in agriculture is the most direct route to raising productivity and reducing rural poverty, and social protection has a role to play in this regard. But the synergies between agriculture and social protection are not well articulated conceptually, nor are they clearly reflected in coordinated policy agendas.

Potential synergies between smallholder agricultural policies and social protection policies in Africa are identified in Devereux *et al.* (2008). Some feedback loops operate from agricultural investments to social protection outcomes. For instance, investing in agriculture should promote production and rural incomes – not only of farmers but also of landless labourers and people who supply goods and services to farmers and their families – and to the extent that these economic impacts are pro-poor the needs for social protection will be reduced. Rising incomes also generate more fiscal resources that can be allocated to financing social protection programmes.

Other feedback loops operate from social protection to agriculture. Well designed and carefully implemented social protection interventions can alleviate seasonal hunger and cash-flow constraints that poor farmers face, allowing them to invest in better nutrition and to purchase key agricultural inputs such as fertiliser and improved seeds, which should raise as well as stabilise their crop yields. Social protection mechanisms such as weather-indexed insurance or employment guarantees (discussed elsewhere in this paper) will give farmers confidence to invest in moderate risk-taking behaviours, such as adopting high-yielding varieties, secure in the knowledge that they will be compensated or can earn income from temporary employment if their harvest fails.

However, there are also potential trade-offs or risks, especially if social protection interventions are badly designed or inappropriately implemented. For instance, delivering social assistance in the form of food aid rather than cash transfers can depress food prices and disincentivise local production and trade – but conversely, injecting cash transfers in contexts where markets are weak and fragmented might simply induce food price inflation. Similarly, seasonal public works programmes can create useful physical infrastructure and transfer income to poor rural families, but if they are badly timed they can compete with on-farm labour requirements, compromising the next harvest. So a careful assessment of the local context – livelihoods, markets, seasonality, etc. – is essential before choosing the

most appropriate agricultural investments and designing social protection interventions for maximum effectiveness.

It is also important to recognise that interventions that generate welfare gains for some can result in welfare losses for others, and a policy change that makes some people less vulnerable can at the same time raise the vulnerability of others. The classic dilemma in food security policy concerns the optimal level of food prices. Higher food prices mean higher incomes for farmers, so any policy that raises food prices is pro-farmer. But this outcome is only pro-poor to the extent that poor farmers are producing surpluses for the market (i.e. earning cash income from sales of produce). The poorest and most vulnerable farmers are deficit smallholders who produce too little even to feed their families all year round, and are market-dependent for part of the year (usually during the annual hungry season before the next harvest). Landless labourers and others who are market-dependent all year round also lose out when prices rise. So a 'winners and losers' analysis should always be conducted before adopting any food security policy or social protection intervention, and steps should be implemented in advance to mitigate any adverse consequences for vulnerable groups.

An important but under-recognised feature of social protection is that it represents a return to state interventionism, following a lengthy period (since the 1980s) when neoliberal principles prioritised market forces and the private sector over public action. This is important because food security in much of Africa was compromised by the state's withdrawal from agricultural marketing, research and extension. Devereux (2009) argues that agricultural policies in Africa should focus on addressing the problems that both heavy state intervention (until the 1980s) and agricultural liberalisation (since the 1980s) have failed to solve. Since social protection (broadly defined to include 'livelihood promoting' as well as 'livelihood protecting' mechanisms) opens up policy space for public action to support the livelihoods and wellbeing of the rural poor, it has a useful contribution to make to all of these challenges. There are three specific areas where the potential linkages from social protection to food security through agriculture are strong.

First, social protection can contribute to ensuring that farmers have access to agricultural inputs at affordable prices and on time. During the period of state interventionism, governments tried to achieve this by controlling the supply and prices of fertilisers and seeds, and subsidised these prices or the cost of agricultural credit. But this system was costly and inefficient, and eventually became unviable in most African countries. The transition, through structural adjustment programmes, to liberalisation of agricultural markets was expected to result in a more efficient delivery of inputs to farmers. But for a combination of reasons – including thin markets, dispersed populations, under-developed roads and transport infrastructure, under-capitalised traders, exacerbated in countries like Malawi by landlockedness – the development of well-functioning supply chains was slow and imperfect, and full market prices were simply unaffordable for low-income risk-averse smallholders. The 'new' (post-2000) social protection agenda offers several tools to assist in making fertiliser and seeds accessible to farmers. These include a new generation of agricultural input subsidies, led by the experience of Malawi; inputs-for-work programmes, again piloted successfully in Malawi; and input trade fairs (see Box 2).

Box 2. Case studies of social protection and access to agricultural inputs

Malawi Agricultural Input Subsidy Programme (MAISP)

In 1985, under pressure from international financial institutions, decades of government subsidies to fertiliser in Malawi were ended. This was followed by a period of rising food insecurity until the late 1990s, when free 'Starter Packs' of fertiliser and seed were delivered to all farming families. In 2001 this was scaled back to the 'Targeted Input Programme', reaching just one-third of smallholders, and the following year Malawi suffered its first post-independence famine, which was precipitated by an agricultural drought that led to a production shortfall and abnormally high food prices. In 2005, the government of Malawi reintroduced input subsidies in the form of targeted coupons. These subsidies had two beneficial effects on food security: household and national maize production increased, and market price fluctuations of maize were dampened. In particular, seasonal price spikes were reduced, making food available and affordable at the most difficult time of year. These subsidies have been so successful and politically popular – assisted by several consecutive years of favourable rains – that they have been maintained every year since, and a food crisis on the scale of 2002 has not recurred. A recent review of the first four years of MAISP concluded that it "led to significant increases in national maize production and productivity, and this has contributed to increased food availability, higher real wages and wider economic growth and poverty reduction" (Dorward and Chirwa, 2011: 232).

There is an animated debate about whether MAISP is an agriculture investment programme or a social protection intervention. Although this debate is important at the practical and institutional levels – e.g. in terms of mobilising funding streams and identifying the appropriate Ministry to house the programme – at a conceptual level MAISP can be seen as an intervention that achieves both agricultural and social protection objectives – a synergistic "productivity-enhancing safety net". To illustrate the dual impact of input subsidies, the Starter Pack was costed at \$20m and boosted the national maize harvest by an estimated 16% in 2000, but delivering an equivalent volume of food aid or cash transfers would have cost \$100m or \$107m respectively.

Sources: Devereux, 2009; Dorward and Chirwa, 2011; Levy, 2005

Inputs-for-work (IFW)

Conventional public works programmes pay participants in food rations ('food-for-work') or cash wages ('cash-for-work'). But smallholders in Malawi identify different priority needs at different times of year – cash after harvest when food is plentiful, food during the hungry season when food is scarce and expensive, inputs during the planting season when seeds and fertilisers are urgently needed but prohibitively expensive. Since public works programmes are often timed to operate around planting time, an innovative 'inputs-for-work' project was piloted in 2001 by Emmanuel International, an NGO, which paid 20,000 participants with bags of fertiliser and packs of hybrid maize seed to construct rural roads. These inputs were enough for each household to produce 450kg of maize under optimal conditions, or five months of staple food needs for an average-sized Malawian family. Feedback from participants found that payment in inputs was more popular than payment in either cash or food. The project cost US\$ 750,000 and generated an estimated 9,000 tonnes of maize, worth US\$ 1.8m.

Source: Carr, 2002

Input Trade Fairs (ITF)

Input Trade Fairs are a means of ensuring that food insecure farmers are assured access to inputs such as seeds, fertiliser, pesticides and implements, by giving them cash-denominated vouchers to purchase these inputs at a market specially convened for this purpose on a specified

date, to which traders are also invited. ITF are commonly used as a disaster recovery mechanism, for example after a drought or flood destroys household seed stocks, but they can also be used to boost food production in food insecure households that cannot afford to access good quality seed and other inputs through the market. ITF have been organised in Mozambique every year since 2001, reaching over 266,000 households. By bringing farmers and traders together in a marketplace – rather than distributing inputs through parastatal agencies – ITF respond to market failures in the short term and promote market development. Rigorous evaluations have not yet been conducted, but ITF appear to be fairly effective at achieving their immediate objectives, and they are popular with both farmers and traders. However, they are relatively expensive and – because the policy in Mozambique is never to repeat an ITF in the same location – it is not clear whether they are generating sufficient momentum to build functioning markets in the longer term.

Source: Ellis et al., 2009

Second, social protection can contribute to strengthening of rural markets to stabilise commodity prices, especially of staple foods. Seasonal price fluctuations are a source of food insecurity and impoverishment throughout rural Africa, because they reduce real incomes of market-dependent poor families. Social protection that stabilises prices therefore also raises incomes. During the period of state interventionism, mechanisms used by the 'old social protection agenda' to dampen prices and smooth consumption across seasons included pan-territorial and pan-seasonal prices for staple foods – a single price was fixed by government decree for the entire country for the entire year, which was either enforced by policing traders or defended through open market operations by parastatals (buying food after harvest and releasing it later in the year to stabilise market supplies). Price interventions were expensive and were either subverted by private traders or undermined private sector activity, so they were abandoned in the 1980s. A 'new social protection agenda' for addressing price variability would include cash transfers, possibly linked to public works projects that build rural feeder roads to reduce transaction costs for farmers and traders. If markets cannot be strengthened directly, cash transfers can help to build rural markets and strengthen market linkages both horizontally and vertically, simply by boosting demand, thereby increasing rural market activity, incentivising local farmers, attracting traders and making trade more competitive. Evidence for the local market multiplier effects of cash transfers came from a study in one district of Malawi where cash transfers were disbursed in 2007, which found a multiplier of over 2.0 (Davies and Davey 2008).

Third, social protection can help to build essential rural infrastructure and enabling institutions. In their analysis of the causes of persistent poverty in rural Africa, Dorward et al. (2004) argued that the policy prescriptions of the Washington Consensus were not necessarily wrong, but that they were badly timed and incorrectly sequenced. In southeast Asia, the period of heavy government intervention in agriculture coincided with public investment in building physical infrastructure such as roads and irrigation systems, and market-related infrastructure such as transport networks and telecommunications. When the state withdrew from agriculture, the private sector was well placed to utilise this infrastructure and a smooth transition to a high productivity private-sector led agricultural growth trajectory was achieved in many countries. In Africa, however, the state was forced to withdraw from agriculture before the essential physical and marketing infrastructure was in place. As a consequence, a vacuum emerged and farmers especially in remote rural areas

lost their access to inputs, marketing outlets and agricultural services (research and extension) from either public agencies (parastatals, the Ministry of Agriculture) or the private sector (traders). Accepting that functioning rural infrastructure is a precondition for agricultural development, social protection can contribute most directly through public works programmes, which have the double benefit of not only transferring income to participants but constructing, rehabilitating or maintaining physical infrastructure such as rural feeder roads, micro-dams, irrigation canals, and terracing of hillsides for soil conservation and higher crop yields. In effect, the income transferred by public works is its 'social protection' feature, while the assets built are its 'agricultural support' feature.

3. Enhancing social justice

The linkages from social justice to food security might seem tenuous at first, but food insecurity is often correlated with social exclusion and political marginalisation, so addressing these underlying determinants might be more effective and sustainable than intervening only at the technical level (e.g. by delivering free or subsidised inputs, which addresses a symptom of the problem rather than its causes). The social justice aspect of a social protection or food security programme is very often related to its governance, and this can be addressed by taking steps to ensure that the programme is designed and implemented in a participatory and democratic manner. Three examples are discussed here: rights-based approaches, targeting, and social audits.

3.1. Rights-based approaches

Narrowly targeted social protection or food security programmes are discretionary interventions that can be terminated at any time – and often are, especially those that are project-based and externally funded by donors. By contrast, permanent programmes run by governments on a 'rights' basis are both more socially just – because they are based on an implicit or legally binding 'social contract' between governments and citizens – and more effective – because citizens who are active claimants of entitlements to social assistance can plan ahead more confidently than can people who are passive beneficiaries of discretionary handouts. A good example is the comparison between 'public works programmes' and 'employment guarantee schemes' – a small but fundamental design modification to employment-based safety nets that transforms access to social protection, from supply-driven and discretionary to demand-driven and guaranteed.

A public works programme is available to some people in its catchment area (with workplaces often limited by the nature of the work or a budget quota) for a limited period of time. An employment guarantee scheme, like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India, provides assured work to anyone who needs it at any time, within walking distance of their home (at least in theory – implementation challenges mean that this promise has not yet been fully delivered throughout rural India). The MGNREGA is a 'right to work' that is actually the product of the 'Right to Food Campaign', which mobilised around drought-related deaths by starvation in Rajasthan, arguing that India's Constitution protects "the right to life", and that the state has a legal responsibility to uphold this right. The employment guarantee is a powerful social protection mechanism that serves as a legally enforceable right to food security. Though expensive and complex to implement, the concept of an employment guarantee has great potential for Africa, and

is currently being piloted as the 'Community Work Programme' in South Africa (Philip 2010).

3.1. Targeting

Community-based targeting is popular on social protection programmes, not only because it draws on local knowledge to identify the poorest and most vulnerable community members, thereby overcoming the information asymmetry between outsiders and insiders, but also because it appears to be a more participatory and 'bottom-up' approach to the challenge of beneficiary identification than externally administered approaches such as a proxy means test. However, community-based targeting is susceptible to elite capture by wealthy and powerful groups (e.g. village headmen and their relatives) and the replication of local power hierarchies, which could result in many vulnerable community members being excluded rather than selected for the programme.

One innovative solution to this problem is 'triangulated community wealth ranking', which has been successfully deployed in Malawi to target 'emergency cash transfers' in response to drought-induced food insecurity (see Devereux 2008). The community is divided into three groups – men, women and leaders – and each group compiles their own wealth ranking of local households or families, which are then compared in a community-wide forum. Introducing this mechanism, rather than allowing community leaders or an elite-dominated committee to decide, ensures that minority voices (such as women) are heard and prevents the elites (who are outvoted 2 to 1) from capturing the benefits of the programme for themselves. To the extent that better targeting outcomes are achieved, this 'social justice' approach to targeting can have direct positive impacts on household food security.

3.3. Social audits

Rights-based approaches have the advantage of allowing poor and socially marginalised people to hold governments accountable for the delivery of policies, programmes and laws. However, genuine empowerment does not occur unless unequal power relations are challenged and transformed, so that the powerless gain real control over decisions made by others that affect their lives and livelihoods. One mechanism that gives poor people some power over government programmes is 'social audits', which have been used effectively in India to monitor delivery of social protection and food security programmes such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (as discussed above) and the Public Distribution System (which purchases food from farmers and sells it to poor families at heavily subsidised prices). Social audits can vary from details of government programmes being read out in public meetings, to detailed scrutiny by communities of programme activities, budgets and spending.

According to Vij (2011), social audits are an important vehicle for improving service delivery and governance – they can strengthen decentralisation and democratic accountability and citizen empowerment. They also have positive social effects, by increasing community participation and empowering citizens. Examples of grievances identified and addressed through MGNREGA social audits in India include refusals to register people, non-payment or late payment of wages, fraud by local officials, and failure to meet legislated gender quotas on projects (one-third of workers should be women).

4. Policy options for African countries

Social protection interventions are often introduced as single instruments – food aid, cash transfers, school feeding, public works programmes, and so on. Evaluations are invariably positive: transfers of food, cash or employment opportunities to poor people generally leave them better off than before. These positive outcomes can be measured in food security terms – beneficiaries have enhanced access to food, dietary diversity increases, nutrition status improves. However, single instruments tend to be targeted only at restricted numbers of people, and they deliver poverty reduction and food security benefits only as long as the intervention lasts. Since definitions of food security refer to assured access to adequate food to all people at all times, this does not amount to a comprehensive and sustainable food security system.

A comprehensive approach to social protection for food security in African countries should include several components with distinct objectives, that together constitute a comprehensive system: (1) stabilising income or food production, (2) raising income or food production, and (3) enhancing social justice.

Stabilising income: Fluctuations in income, food availability and prices cause seasonal and chronic food insecurity, but this can be managed or reduced by various social protection mechanisms. Innovative *social insurance* mechanisms, such as weather-indexed insurance, can avoid many problems of conventional crop insurance, but have not yet been scaled up or commercialised beyond subsidised pilot projects. *Public works* programmes (food- or cash-for-work) have the dual advantage of transferring income, which can support families through the hungry season or in bad years if they are properly timed, and creating useful infrastructure that enhances food security – feeder roads link farmers and traders to markets, soil and water conservation projects stabilise crop production. *Employment guarantee* schemes have the added advantage of making social protection demand-driven, such that access to waged work is available whenever needed. *Food aid* has become unfashionable in non-emergency contexts, because it can disincentivise farmers and traders, but it has the advantage of retaining its real value in commodity terms. *Cash transfers* are increasingly popular as a means of providing access to food through the market, but they are susceptible to price inflation unless they are index-linked. *Buffer stock management* – parastatal agencies purchasing food after harvest for resale several months later when prices rise – was a popular mechanism for stabilising food supplies and prices in the past, but is less common now, because government intervention in agricultural marketing has been discouraged since the 1980s.

Raising income: There are positive synergies between social protection and agriculture. Investing in agriculture raises the production and incomes of the rural poor, reducing the needs for social protection. Similarly, putting effective social protection mechanisms in place encourages risk-averse farmers to invest more in crop and livestock production. Good design and implementation are crucial to good outcomes – public works must be well timed not to conflict with peak on-farm labour requirements, food aid should be avoided if it disincentivises local production and trade, cash transfers should not be introduced where markets are so weak that they simply cause inflation. Agriculture-

related social protection mechanisms that boost farmers' access to inputs include agricultural input subsidies, inputs-for-work and input trade fairs. Some social protection interventions can also strengthen rural market functioning, for instance public works projects that construct roads that integrate markets and reduce transactions costs for traders. Cash transfers themselves can stimulate local economic activity and generate economic multipliers.

Enhancing social justice: Food insecurity is often best addressed by tackling its underlying social and political causes – such as exclusion and marginalisation of the poor and vulnerable. This can be achieved by upholding the “right to food”, by making access to social protection rights-based and enforceable by law. The best-known example is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India, which provides for up to 100 days of paid employment each year to every rural Indian household, on demand. The participation of poor and food insecure people can also be enhanced through community-based targeting. If this is implemented in a genuinely democratic style, for instance by using triangulated community wealth ranking, it becomes a way of ensuring the inclusion of the poorest and most food insecure individuals and households in social protection and agricultural support programmes. Finally, the introduction of social audits has proved to be a powerful means of democratising the governance of social protection programmes in India, improving accountability and empowering the poor to take control over decisions by government that directly affect their lives.

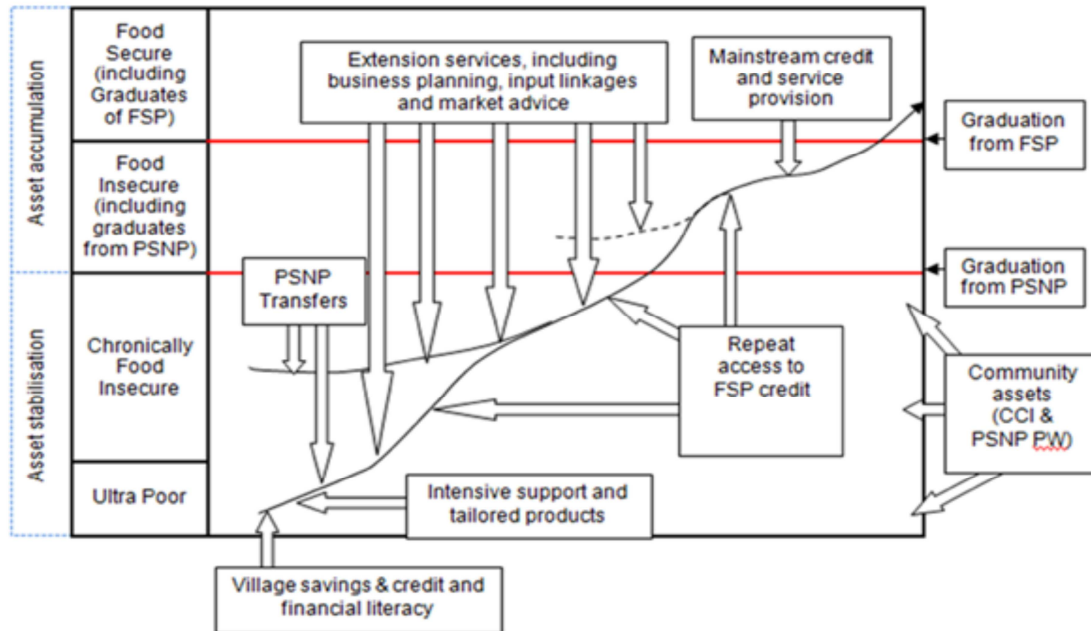
As noted above, food security cannot be achieved with a single instrument – a package of measures is required. Two comprehensive approaches to tackling food insecurity using social protection instruments are discussed next: the ‘minimum intervention framework for fighting seasonal hunger’, and integrated graduation models.

Vaitla *et al.* (2009) proposed a “minimum essential intervention package against seasonal hunger” that could reduce undernutrition rates substantially and save millions of lives around the world. The package comprises four interventions – community-based management of acute malnutrition, child growth promotion initiatives, seasonal employment programmes, and social pensions – that address the needs of young children, pregnant and lactating mothers, unemployed and underemployed households, and people who are unable to work. Universal implementation of these four measures would cost £26-49 billion annually, equivalent to about 0.1% of global GDP. A broader intervention package includes more familiar social protection mechanisms: price-indexed cash transfers and food assistance, weather-indexed agricultural insurance, grain reserves, and access to fertiliser and seed.

The ‘Food Security Programme’ in Ethiopia delivers packages of interventions that have both ‘livelihood protection’ (stabilisation of consumption and assets) and ‘livelihood promotion’ (raising consumption and accumulation of assets) objectives. In Ethiopia, graduation from ‘chronic food insecurity’ to ‘food sufficiency’ is promoted through a combination of (1) PSNP Public Works, which transfers cash or food and creates useful physical infrastructure; (2) the Household Asset Building Programme, which supports agricultural and non-agricultural livelihoods through asset transfers, extension services and subsidised credit; and (3) Complementary Community Investments, which addresses community-level needs, such as for large-scale irrigation systems to raise and stabilise crop

yields. The projected pathway to graduation from food insecurity to food security is illustrated in Figure 3 below. A similar model has been adopted by the 'Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme' (VUP) in Rwanda, which also aims at graduation: (1) by implementing public works projects that concentrate mostly on upgrading agricultural land, and (2) by offering low-interest loans to either individuals or borrower groups for micro-enterprises that diversify risks away from farming.

Figure 3. Pathways to food security on Ethiopia's social protection programmes



Source: Government of Ethiopia, 2009: 16

A common theme uniting all these approaches is the need to tackle food insecurity with integrated social protection packages that both protect minimum subsistence (in economic terms, reducing the variance of consumption) and also offer opportunities to increase incomes and assets (raising mean consumption). Only this two-pronged strategy has the potential to achieve sustainable food security and 'graduation' off dependence on social protection programmes in the medium to longer term.

Conclusion

The rapidly evolving social protection policy agenda has great potential to promote household food security, both directly and indirectly. In Africa, social protection programmes evolved out of social safety nets such as food aid and food-for-work, that were devised to address food insecurity in rural communities. Contemporary social protection interventions often target poor and food insecure smallholder farmers. Food security can be promoted by enhancing **food availability** (through input subsidies or inputs-for-work) or by enhancing **access to food** (by delivering food or cash transfers). But social protection should also aim to **stabilise** food availability and access, and it can achieve this by introducing innovative insurance mechanisms (such as weather-indexed insurance), or by index-linking cash transfers so they retain their purchasing power even when prices rise, or through buffer stock management which smoothes food supplies and prices between the

main annual harvest and the hungry season. Finally, introducing elements of ***social justice*** to social protection programmes, such as employment guarantee schemes, community-based targeting and social audits, can make an important contribution to realising the right to food for all people at all times.

It is important to end by recognising that several constraints remain to the implementation of comprehensive social protection programmes at scale. Several African countries have introduced social protection programmes only because donor agencies advocated for them and have provided financial and technical assistance. Many governments remain sceptical about social protection and are especially wary of rights-based approaches, believing that they are fiscally unaffordable and can create 'dependency', even though there is no evidence for either assertion. Another challenge is that sustainable graduation has not yet been achieved on a large scale in Africa. On the other hand, the evidence base on the positive impacts of social protection on food security and other indicators of wellbeing is growing rapidly, and the ongoing spread of social protection programmes throughout Africa now appears to be irreversible.

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